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2009 is banner year for MACo, members

By Mike Harbour, MACo Communications Officer

This year's legislative session has been a busy one for our executive committee and board members, as well as MACo staff. We've been fortunate to see many resolutions, created by our members, turn into bills that may soon become law. Considering this is taking place during the association's 100th year of existence, it's quite a fitting reward for all the hard work.

There's only one way MACo could reach the century mark: focus. Thanks to dedicated county elected officials as well as equally devoted employees, the association has focused on helping counties serve their citizens more effectively by ensuring state and federal legislators don't overlook local government.

Nowhere is this more evident than the *The Fergus County Courthouse, built in 1909, also celebrated its centennial this year.*

recent effort to get \$10 million in stimulus funds for Montana's 56 counties. Although nothing has yet been confirmed, if HB 645 is signed into law by Gov. Brian Schweitzer, each county is due to receive a minimum of \$100,000 plus an allocation based on the gas tax formula.

While many counties could each easily spend the entire \$10 million on their own projects, the amounts determined by HB 645 are a step in the right direction. Even considering the stipulations placed on the projects, the funds still will go far in improving infrastructure across Montana.

Every county commission deserves a round of applause for reacting so quickly to our request for project lists last month. Circumstances required a fast turnaround and

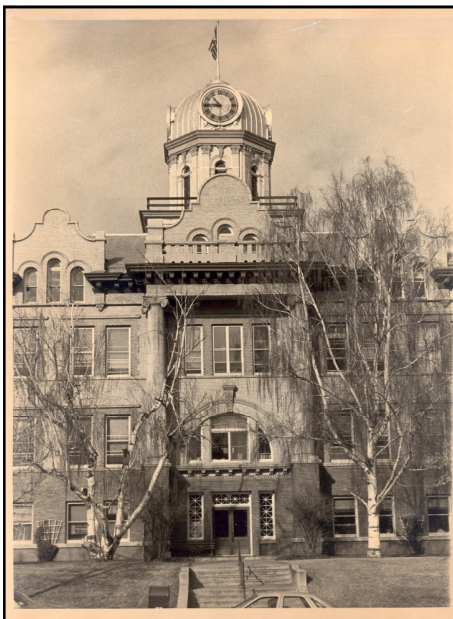
most every county responded by our deadline. Those efforts greatly aided MACo in seeing the stimulus bill move forward in the state legislature.

Now, MACo needs your help. In early March, we sent requests to each clerk and recorder asking for a list of former elected officials to whom we'd like to invite to our Sunday night banquet at this year's annual conference. We also requested names and titles of all deceased former elected officials so we may compile a state-wide history of those people who served.

To those counties that already responded with the lists, thanks so much for the hard work. We know it probably wasn't an easy task, but we appreciate the assistance. If your county is still working on this project, remember we need the lists by April 15. That will allow us to get invitations in the mail and compile the history.

In preparation for a great annual conference that properly recognizes MACo's 100th anniversary, we've formed a centennial conference planning committee; if you're interested in attending its next meeting in May, tell Karen Houston, our meeting planner, you'd like to attend.

Finally, if you haven't already done so, please make plans to attend our conference in Helena this Sept. 20-24 at the Red Lion Colonial Hotel. Like always, it's open to all county elected officials and spouses, and we urge you to be a part of this historic event. It will be an event you won't forget.





MACo News

COBRA means insurance to some, snakes on a plain to others

By Owen Voigt, MACo Health Care Trust Administrator

The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) gives workers and their families who lose their health benefits the right to choose to continue group health benefits provided by their group health plan for limited periods of time under certain circumstances, such as voluntary or involuntary job loss and a few other qualifiers. COBRA applies to employers who had 20 or more employers in the prior year. At our office, we jokingly refer to COBRA as the big snake.

Word association brings to mind events that have occurred, and for me, the association for COBRA is particularly memorable. I grew up on a little sheep and cattle ranch in rural North Dakota, so when I think of COBRA or big snakes, I think of the time my sister Val and I were stacking bales on the north river bottom. Dad had baled alfalfa hay and used a bale buncher to pile the bales, so there were thousands of bales on the field in groups of eight or nine to the group. We had to stack the bales so he could come by and pick them up with the tractor.

The river bottom was immediately south of a steep sandstone ridge and was, in parts, nearly inaccessible. In North Dakota, these are excellent snake den sites. So we have a big steep hill adjacent to the hay field, snakes on the hill in large numbers, bales in a hay field that attract mice, and mice that attract snakes. Guess what? When the bales are in loose piles on the field and we are stacking them, chances are good — no, actually great — that the stackers will encounter snakes. On a good year, we would kill more than 20 rattlesnakes on my folk's ranch. Other facts to consider: on hot summer days snakes like shade, so picking up a bale and moving it removes the shade. When you pick up a bale, it is in front of and below your eyesight so you can't see what's under it.

In Genesis, there is a verse about how women and snakes will not get along. In the case of my sister, this was true. We were stacking away when she picked up a bale that had what I thought was a medium-sized, and very upset, rattlesnake under it. Anyway, she was holding this bale when she heard the buzz from the snake and felt

it strike her boot top. Another important fact is a snake's fangs will stick in the soft leather of a boot top. My folks also knew the odds of encountering snakes, so we kids always wore high-top leather boots when stacking bales.

To say she immediately exhibited signs of fear and anxiety would be an understatement. She freaked out. She had reasons for some excitement with a rattlesnake whose fangs were stuck in her boot. He can't get away, she can't kick him off.

I thought she overacted a bit, what with the jumping and kicking and screaming. I never knew she could move like that; she would have been a hands-down winner in a Dancing with the Stars contest. Val was screaming and jumping with this snake flopping on the ground against her leg, getting wrapped around her leg, then back to flopping. It all went on for a bit. Where was I? Lying on the ground laughing so hard I thought I was going to have a bodily function accident.

Finally, the snakes fangs broke and it went sailing off into the air. My sister fell to the ground totally exhausted and not just a little mad at me. I still recall that incident as one of the funniest moments of my childhood. I talked to my sister about this later and she did not recall it as being funny at all. It is strange how boys and girls see things differently. It's kind of like how the federal government sees things differently than employers and employees.

So, while my word association story is long, it brings a smile to my face whenever I think of it. COBRA itself, however, does not do the same thing. The new American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides new rules where, under certain circumstances, involuntarily terminated individuals can have 65 percent of their COBRA premiums paid. The county, special district or other employer must pay 65 percent of the premium when the qualified, involuntarily terminated employee selects the COBRA option. Employers can deduct the amount of the premium payment from their federal payroll tax payments.

There are numerous provisions to the law and for more information, go to <http://www.dol.gov>. For other questions, please contact your health benefits carrier. Finally, remind me sometime to tell you about the proper application of certain medicines for snow snake bites.



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Health Care Trust Calendar of Events

April 17	Rates mailed to July renewal groups
May 1-June 15	July open enrollment period
May 15	Signed renewal rates due

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During NACo's annual Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., last month, a group of Montana commissioners, who serve on several NACo committees, visited with the state's Congressional delegation. MACo President Mike McGinley presented Sen. Max Baucus (photo on left, courtesy of NACo) with NACo's Legislator of the Year Award.

Trust still accepting project apps

The Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust is accepting proposals for project funding for 2009. The trust will make available up to \$125,000 for projects that restore and conserve fisheries, wildlife and riparian habitat, enhance public hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities and improve public access to public lands.

The trust will accept proposals through April 11 for statewide projects with a minimum of \$62,500 to be provided to projects within the hydrologic drainage of the Missouri River between Holter Lake dam and the confluence of the Missouri River. For more information, contact the trust at (800) 517-7256 or fwctrust@mtwf.org.

Conference geared to county leaders

Safeguarding the public interest is the theme of this year's Cornerstones Conference, presented by Anderson ZurMuehlen & Co., P.C.

The day-long conference, to be held in Billings on April 28 and Missoula on May 5, will focus on numerous topics such as public expectations for transparency and accountability, making sound financials decisions, protecting assets and data, and meeting debt obligations.

The conference, lead by nationally recognized industry leaders and experts, is geared to elected officials, executive directors, and others responsible for direct financial management decisions.

For more information or to register, contact Kelsey Ferro at 442-1040 or kferro@azworld.com.

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NACo committee report: Finance & Intergovernmental Affairs

By Allan Underdal, Toole County Commissioner and NACo Finance & Intergovernmental Affairs Committee member

The one subcommittee that met during last month's NACo Legislative Conference was the Native American Subcommittee. We discussed a resolution, brought to us by a member from Nebraska, proposing Congress authorize a new PILT program to pay counties in lieu of lost property tax revenue from tribally owned lands and property held in trust by the federal government.

There was considerable discussion. The resolution was written with the thought in mind it had no negative financial bearing on tribes, as it would be the federal government making the PILT payment. If passed, it would prove beneficial to both native and non-native constituents, as it would provide more dollars to local governments to provide services.

The taking of land into trust is a process that is still continuing to the detriment of local governments. The resolution passed the subcommittee, the full committee, then to the board of directors for review. The resolution was brought to the attention of our Congressional delegation by fellow committee member Vic Miller.

Our subcommittee on elections did not meet officially at the conference, but I did attend some sessions of the National Association of County Recorders, Elections Offi-

cials & Clerks, which also held its legislative convention at our hotel. In one session, the Minnesota secretary of state was there to share the U.S. Senate race election saga still going on between Al Franken and Norm Coleman.

We also heard the Holt Bill may be resurrected, which proposes more changes to HAVA and the voting process. NACo's position is that we look closely at any new proposals to see if they mandate changes without providing resources to carry them out, otherwise known as the unfunded mandate. NACo is still working hard to get Congress to fully fund HAVA and provide funding to update and maintain the current or any new system that may be proposed. We carried that message to Sens. Baucus and Tester as well as Rep. Rehberg and their staffs.

Having our commissioners on these NACo committees is very important. Making sure Montana and the West has a voice in policy decisions that affect us such as PILT, voting issues, land and water use, and tax policy for renewable energy, to name a few, is crucial.

We appreciate the chance to represent you on the Finance and Intergovernmental Affairs Steering Committee and we appreciate the financial support and partnership of the secretary of state's office.

NACo committee report: Western Interstate Region

By Lesley Robinson, Phillips County Commissioner and NACo Western Interstate Region board member

We heard a brief history of WIR from the Idaho and Utah county executives. WIR was officially organized at the NACo annual convention in 1954. Six states were charter members of the Western Region. In 1974, it became known as Western Interstate Region.

Nancy McNally from Van Ness Feldman spoke to us about the National Endangered Species Act Reform Coalition (NESARC). NESARC was founded in 1991. It has a board that consists of a wide variety of interests. Ryan Yates from NACo is one of the board's 75 members. Changes made to the Section Seven Consultation rule by the former administration are under fire by the new house. They are working to overturn the rules made in a transparent public process, subject to review and comment.

A short report was given to us by Jim French, president of the National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition. He had a quote that I thought was accurate: "If you're not at the table, you're likely on the menu." Secure Rural Schools funding expires in just a couple of years. We need to keep involved and keep working with our congressional delegation; the same goes for PILT funding.

Cynthia Moses-Nedd spoke about cooperating agency status compared to coordination. There's been a lot of talk recently that coordination is the key to getting something accomplished with a federal agency. Cooperating agency status is designated legal status under

NEPA. The federal agencies are required to invite counties to the table.

Coordination is not a status. It requires federal agency's plans are coordinated with county plans to the extent possible, which could mean if the law allows it. She considers cooperating and coordination a parallel track, not either or.

Moses-Nedd will now be a NACo liaison for all the Department of Interior agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We have never had one before. The new administration found out that she was only the BLM liaison and thought that it would make more sense to have Cynthia cover all of the Department of Interior. This could be very helpful.

We supported a NACo resolution to make a policy to create a new federal program that would reimburse county and local government for lost property taxes incurred due to properties being held in trust by the federal government without negatively impacting PILT payments. The policy is very vague and will give NACo the authority to look into it. There are several counties around the nation that are having extensive impacts to their tax base due to land going into federal trust.

Our next WIR meeting will be held May 20-22 in Umatilla County (Pendleton), Ore. The 2010 WIR meeting will be in Billings.



NACo committee report: Public Lands

By Greg Chilcott, Ravalli County Commissioner and NACo Public Lands Committee member

At this year's meeting, Ryan Yates, NACo associate legislative director, thanked everyone for their hard work and support in achieving full funding of PILT and SRS. Discussion followed regarding future funding reauthorization and the need to begin NOW to develop and implement a strategy for 2012. The general consensus was "off-sets" need to be identified for successful future funding.

Cynthia Moses-Nedd, BLM liaison, explained while "Cooperating Agency Status" and "Coordinating Agency Status" are different, both can be held by a county simultaneously. Moses-Nedd is now be the NACo liaison for all Interior agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

Randy Phillips, USDA Forest Service liaison, said some states are may redefine the formula allocating percentages of SRS funding between schools and roads.

Janette Kaiser, director of rangeland management, USFS, stated the Forest Service, BLM and NRCS have convened a "Sustainable Rangeland Roundtable" to develop an all-encompassing rangeland policy that considers social, economic and ecological impacts.

Jim French, president of the National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition, discussed the need to stay involved and keep working with our congressional delegation(s) on SRS and PILT funding.

Gail Kimbell, USDA Forest Service chief, recognized the Public Land Steering Committee valuable assistance

in supporting increased funding for fire suppression and increased federal contract terms. She briefly discussed the \$1.15 billion to the USFS in the stimulus package. About 10 percent is already committed, and she said \$659 million is dedicated to construction and maintenance; \$250 million to fuel reduction and eco-system management on federal lands and another \$250 million for eco-system management on state lands.

Meghan Conklin, a legislative staffer on the House Committee on Natural Resources, stated 48 percent of the USFS budget is now expended on fire suppression rather than management. She discussed the federal land policy to combat climate change and the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act for restoration of forest landscapes, wilderness and wild and scenic rivers.

A resolution was proposed to support modification of the USDA Forest Service Wildland Fire Budget. The resolution also supports creating an independent Emergency Fire Fund to cover the cost of suppressing national wildland fires that exceed regionally budgeted, first-response suppression efforts. The "do pass" recommendation was unanimous from the Public Lands Steering Committee. Historically, when costs for suppression exceeded appropriated levels, the agency borrowed emergency trust funds that were reimbursed by Congress at the end of the fire season via supplemental appropriations.

A resolution also was proposed supporting legislation to establish renewable biomass from federal lands can be applied toward the existing renewable fuels standard and any renewable electricity standard. This would revise the definition of "woody biomass" to include public lands as a source of renewable fuels. Congressman Rehberg introduced H.R. 1111, which is generally consistent with this resolution, on Feb. 23.

Finally, the committee unanimously supported policy and legislation that will make accurate land parcel data available to levels of government. Accurate parcel data is a critical tool for both the public and private sectors.

Ken Salazar, secretary of the Interior, discussed his energy priorities. He said the U.S. imports 70 percent of its oil, and national security compels us to become energy independent. Salazar describes this as an economic opportunity in renewable and alternative energy development and marketing.

The MACo contingent met with staff members of Sen. Baucus' office, Sen. Tester and his staff, and Congressman Rehberg. Many topics were discussed with our representatives. On behalf of the Forest Counties, I thanked them for their support on PILT and SRS funding, and made several requests regarding forest policy.

Later, President Mike McGinley presented Sen. Baucus with a "Legislator of the Year" award from NACo for his leadership in the PILT and SRS funding.

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NACo News



NACo committee report: Finance & Intergovernmental Affairs

By Vic Miller, Blaine County Commissioner and NACo Finance & Intergovernmental Affairs Committee member

On March 7, I, along with Alan Underdal, attended the only sub-committee meeting of the three usually held in Finance and Intergovernmental Affairs. The Native American sub-committee met to discuss the resolution supporting the creation of a new federal program that would reimburse local governments for lost property taxes incurred due to Indian properties held in trust by the federal government. After considerable discussion on what defines trust land, the resolution was passed by a vote of 26 to 1, then it was moved to the full committee.

The full committee meeting was held March 8. While three resolutions were before the group, the resolution concerning trust lands was last on the agenda for the most debate and discussion. The other two resolutions passed unanimously. One deals with access to GSA lists for local and county governments to access green vehicle purchases. The other dealt with accelerated sales tax issues. After considerable discussion, the resolution was passed to the full board of directors. It also was decided to pass this resolution to the public lands committee. I question why this was done as there is really no relation between trust lands and public lands.

While I can personally grasp and support the resolution, I promised the subcommittee to put together an issue paper with my concerns as legislation moves forward. The issues voiced by me, as well as others, have to do with clarifying the background information behind this resolution. I'll forward the paper to MACo on completion.

The NACo Legislative Conference started March 9, however, the general session was missed due to meetings with the staffs of Sens. Baucus and Tester. Most of the day was spent discussing various issues from the various committees and local government concerns specific to Montana. We were fortunate enough to have Sen. Tester and his son, Sean, join us for dinner that evening. It was very thoughtful, in my opinion, that Sen. Tester could make time in his schedule to spend time with us.

March 10 featured a general session where four cabinet secretaries made presentations. Between HUD, Interior, Homeland Security, and Energy, the message was

loud and clear. The stimulus package is the talk of the town and nation. What is equally loud and clear to my ears is the issue of accountability. As sobering as that may sound, I found it refreshing that four cabinet secretaries addressed local government leaders in one day.

On March 11, many of us enjoyed Sen. Baucus' Montana Coffee Session. There were easily 100 people from all over Montana in attendance. We ended our day with a meeting with Rep. Rehberg, again reiterating the issues facing local government and specific Montana issues.

I enjoyed the work of the subcommittees and committees and I look forward to the annual convention. I was also impressed with the message of accountability coming out of the new administration.



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Local chapters of such groups as the American Rental Association (www.ararental.org), the Associated General Contractors (www.agc.org/index.wv), and the American Road and Transport Builders Association (www.artba.org) can help you set up equipment training for your local police.

The first way you can provide law enforcement with information about your own equipment is to make sure there are a number of visible decals on each machine that clearly show the name and telephone number of your company. The decals should be spread over as many areas of the equipment surface as possible so that even if thieves try to remove them, chances are, they won't find all of them.

Next, you should register your equipment by serial number and any other applicable numbers on a national database that law enforcement uses to identify equipment. The National Equipment Register (www.nerusa.com) manages a national database that

records equipment theft data and makes it available to law enforcement 24 hours a day. NER also provides instructors, lesson plans, and publications to support police training free of charge.

There is another strategy you can try to convince police in your community to focus on equipment theft. Ask local equipment owners to pitch in on an equipment investigation fund. This money can then be allocated toward overtime costs during which the officers must focus on equipment investigations. Discuss the fund idea with a senior law enforcement official to learn what conditions must be met before proceeding with the fund.

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NACo committee report: Community & Economic Development

By Cynthia Johnson, Pondera County Commissioner and NACo Community & Economic Dev. Steering Committee member

At the Housing Subcommittee meeting last month, Nick Autorina, director of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) in Cobb County, Ga., talked about how the county deals primarily with the foreclosure issues in this urban eastern region — via the NSP — where it identifies, acquires, and rehabs properties in foreclosure or abandoned due to foreclosure. The NSP is truly run as a home ownership program as intended by law. The program is marketed to the workforce in the community.

An asset management firm assumes the majority liability of the program, not the county or other government related entity. They target county residents with an emphasis on county employees, public safety employees, health care, and education employees. The local program is primarily designed for stable workers.

Lynn Ross, state and local initiatives director for the National Housing Conference, discussed trends nationwide relative to housing stabilization and resources available. Housing costs needs and challenges vary substantially from place to place.

Ross said the foreclosure crisis isn't over, housing still isn't affordable, transportation and energy costs continue to rise, game-changing federal legislation is coming and it's not always traditional housing legislation.

So what should we do? Ross suggested we develop comprehensive, coordinated housing policy, focus on production and preservation of homes, link housing to transportation solutions, and create zoning that encourages housing diversity, compact development, and affordability.

Economic Dev./Intl Economic Dev. Jnt. Subcommittee

Dan Kildee, Genesee County (Mich.) treasurer, gave a presentation on his county's Land Bank program. The

Land Bank is a public authority created to deal with distressed/abandoned/foreclosed properties. As treasurer, he took on the task of creating an approach to work with these properties. The former foreclosure law is a four-to-seven year process, providing no clear title, may have hundreds of owners, involves low end speculation, and creates blight.

Michigan changed its laws to correct those deficiencies in the traditional foreclosure law and created the Michigan Land Bank fast track authority which allows counties (or cities) that foreclose to create land banks through an intergovernmental agreement with the state authority. Land Bank properties are tax-exempt and the Land Bank receives funding from tax foreclosure fees.

The county Land Bank works with foreclosure prevention, housing renovation, side lot transfer, property maintenance, planning, rental management, clean and green properties, demolition, and new development.

Jim Carr, COO of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), had a different approach to the housing and credit predicament. Carr said there's no reason to be in this foreclosure crisis, and foreclosures are expected to number up to 10 million in the next five years.

Also, unemployment equals foreclosures. For every 100 newly unemployed workers, there will be 40 foreclo-

Please see "Commissioners..." on page 8



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NACo committee report: Community & Economic Development

Continued from page 7

tures. Less than 10 percent of subprime loans between 1998 and 2006 were to first-time home buyers.

Carr indicated we're not addressing the real problem: neighborhood stabilization is not enough. We need to align economic recovery spending with the foreclosure crisis. More information regarding this approach to the housing issue can be found at www.ncrc.org.

The committee discussed, at length, a resolution on free trade agreements with foreign countries proposed resolution. Resolution was amended and moved forward.

Community and Economic Development Committee

Bruce Katz, managing director of the Brookings Institute and senior policy advisor for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, spoke about some of the highlights of the Recovery Act. He mentioned the potential for multi-jurisdictional responses to the economic issues of the country. The act contains enormous investments in education, innovation, infrastructure; what he defines as quality of place investments, including housing and the greening of the same, and finally – the competitive portion of the funding.

Ron Sims, King County (Wash.) executive, nominated to be the deputy director of HUD, discussed the changes and enhancements he anticipates in the agency, including, but not limited to, a major review of rulemaking and those rules' effectiveness.

Greg Brown, assistant vice president of the National Association of Home Builders, discussed the association's top issue: stimulus funding for housing development, including the \$8,000 tax benefit for purchases of housing and the \$2.2 billion available to jump start affordable housing.

Legislative Update

Daria Daniel, associate legislative director, reviewed several legislative issues that were discussed in the day's presentation – NOFA in May, applications due in July for CDBG competitive funds. Shovel-ready projects will have priority; \$2.2 billion for the HOME program dedicated to the tax rebate for home purchases; \$150 million for local economic development areas in distress, and \$100 million for lead-based paint abatement.

For 2009 appropriations, 11 bills were under a continuing resolution through early March. Daniel anticipates a modest increase in CDBG formula funds to \$56 million.

Representing the Large Urban Caucus, Ilene Lieberman, Broward County (Fla.) commissioner, highlighted the "Restoring the Health Care Partnership" initiative – dealing with those people imprisoned but not convicted of a crime who've lost their civil rights (Medicaid, Medicare, Indian Health Services, etc.).

The Rural Action Caucus report was given by Robert Manuel, Evangeline Parish (La.) president.



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NACo News



Webinar to help counties cope

NACo understands these are very difficult times for counties and their residents. Decreasing revenues and increasing demands for service are forcing officials to make some challenging budget decisions, so NACo will offer a series of free, Leading in Tough Times Webinars to provide information and ideas about coping and recovering from the recession.

The first Webinar in the series airs April 2, with additional episodes due to air April 16, May 7, and June 11. Topics include funding opportunities via federal programs, budget strategies during a recession, and responding to social service needs.

For more information or to register, contact Carrie Clingan at 202/942-4246 or cclingan@naco.org, or visit www.naco.org/toughtimes.

Register online for annual NACo conference

Online registration is now open for NACo's 2009 Annual Conference and Exposition, July 24-28, at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Davidson County (Nashville, Tenn.). When you register online, you'll receive a \$25 discount. To access the registration form or for more information about the conference, visit www.naco.org.

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COPS funding apps due by April 16

At a White House meeting March 18 on the Recovery Act, NACo learned that the Department of Justice (DOJ) had released Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funding on March 16 for competitive grants. Counties have less than one month to request consideration for funding. DOJ officials have asked counties visit www.cops.usdoj.gov to apply. Click on the link in COPS Hiring Recovery Program graphic at top of the page.

CHRP (COPS Hiring Recovery Program) is a competitive grant program that provides funding directly to law enforcement agencies having primary law enforcement authority to create and preserve jobs.

National County Gov't Week nears

National County Government Week (NCGW), held the first full week in May, is an annual celebration of county government. First held in 1991, NCGW raises public awareness and understanding about the roles and responsibilities of the nation's counties.

There are activities at the national, state and local levels during week-long event. More than 1,000 counties annually participate in NCGW by holding a variety of programs and events. These include tours of county facilities, presentations in schools, meetings with business and community leaders, recognition programs for volunteers, briefings on environmental projects and adoption of proclamations.

For more information, visit www.naco.org.

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Around Our Counties

Personnel

CARBON COUNTY has a new county attorney: Alex Nixon. Formerly the county's deputy attorney, Nixon was chosen in March by commissioners to replace Robert Eddleman, who was convicted of federal drug charges last month. Nixon, a University of Montana graduate, became the county's first deputy attorney in 2007.

BUTTE-SILVER BOW COUNTY Health Department Director Rick Larson is now operations manager of the county's water, sewer and solid waste divisions. The move, made in March, was part of management restructuring plan by Chief Executive Paul Babb. Larson, who will report to Public Works Director Dan Dennehy, has worked for the county since 1995; he has led the health department since 2007.

GALLATIN COUNTY's extension office in early March was found not guilty of discrimination claims filed by a former employee in 2005. Lorri Brenneman, who was hired as an executive assistant in 2001, claimed she was subjected to a hostile work environment and fired as a result

of reporting that hostility, but a jury determined otherwise. It was unknown if Brenneman would appeal.

Law Enforcement

LEWIS & CLARK COUNTY process server Renae Smith was charged in March with assault with a weapon following a domestic disturbance the previous month. The case was turned over to the state attorney general's office. Sheriff Leo Dutton said Smith isn't issued a firearm related to her position.

ANACONDA-DEER LODGE COUNTY and the Anaconda Police Protective Association reached a tentative agreement for its detention officers in March. The proposed one-year contract would give the officers a retroactive 3.5-percent raise and boosts longevity pay. The contracts cover seven full-time-equivalent positions.

GLACIER COUNTY's new jail should open this spring, nearly three years after voters approved a 10-year mill levy to fund the project. The new facility, which will require the hiring of four additional detention officers, will handle up to 26 inmates, but the county

says it should average 15 daily. The jail was originally set to open last October.

Miscellany

DAWSON COUNTY commissioners are reconsidering a plan they approved in March to move the weed department back to the West Glendive Public Works building. The office was located to the National Guard armory at the Dawson County Fairgrounds almost two years ago, but issues recently arose about the building's condition. Weed board members previously told commissioners they did not want to move the office.

POWELL COUNTY's planning board in March unanimously approved — after a five-month delay — a new cellular telephone tower in Ovando. Potential sites were long discussed and debated before a suitable location was found that could cover an important roadway and Ovando itself. The tower will include several equipment bays so multiple carriers may collocate at the site.

PARK COUNTY does, as it turns out, have authority to enforce zoning in the "donut" area surrounding

Livingston, according to documentation uncovered by the county attorney's office in March. Commissioners previously announced they had no legal way to apply zoning regulations in the area, but documents show in 1995 the commission did properly adopt them. The county is still determining whether the commission itself or an advisory committee will be in charge of enforcement.

LINCOLN COUNTY's abandoned trailers will soon get the heave-ho this spring, thanks to a free program. The county will remove old trailers at no charge to landowners who request it. The county also is considering allowing residents to haul trailers to the landfill for free disposal.

MEAGHER COUNTY commissioners in early March agreed to a plan that will upgrade the county's airport. The project, which could cost up to \$3.8 million, will involve resurfacing and widening the runway, some shoulder work, and adding a drainage system. Resurfacing the apron area to support heavy aircraft also may be included; the funding would come from federal sources and loans from other airports.

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Announcements & Reminders

Mark Your Calendars

Snook joins Health Care Trust

You may hear a new voice at the other end of the line when you next call MACo's Health Care Trust. That's the voice of Gayle Snook, a short-term employee who will fill in a couple of months for Alyce Bailey, enrollment and eligibility specialist and customer service representative, who's temporarily out of the office. Snook will be ably supported by Laurie Goltry, administrative enrollment assistant, during Bailey's absence.



They're going fast! 2009 Directory of Montana County Officials

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April

April 2 Legislature: transmittal of amendments to general bills
April 14 Legislature: trans. of amendments to approp. bills
April 15-16 MACo JPIA/JPA/HCT board meetings*
April 16 Legislature: transmittal of amendments to revenue bills and revenue-estimating joint resolutions
April 20 Legislature: transmittal of interim study resolutions
April 25 Legislature: session adjourns

May

May 19-22 NACo WIR meeting, Pendleton, Ore.
May 25 Memorial Day

Upcoming Events

Sept. 20-24 MACo's 100th Annual Conference*

*All meetings are held in Helena unless noted.

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